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# TYPES OF DEMENTIA

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all	Articles	Y
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Dementia is the term used for loss of mental function to the extent that this interferes person's daily life. It is not a disease in itself but rather a group of symptoms which ac certain diseases. It is a very broad term which describes a loss of memory, intellect, ra social skills and normal emotional reactions. Alzheimer's disease is the major cause of Dementing illnesses can affect adults of any age, although they are more likely to occu

#### What are the most common forms of dementia?

There are many causes of dementia so it is important to consult a doctor who is experi diagnosing these disorders as soon as possible.

Alzheimer's disease is the most common of the dementias and accounts for about 70 of all cases. In its early phases, the symptoms can be subtle, like memory loss and vac taking longer to do routine tasks, losing the point of a conversation or repeating onese disease gradually progresses, the changes become more dramatic until, in the last stage person may need constant nursing care.

Parkinson's disease (PD) is a progressive disorder of the central nervous system, ch by tremors, stiffness in limbs and joints, speech impediments and difficulty in initiating movements. Late in the course of the disease, some patients develop dementia. It is the that most older people with Parkinson's disease also have dementia. Medication may ir physical symptoms, but these may worsen dementia.

Diffuse Lewy Body disease: a significant number of people diagnosed with dementia to have tiny spherical structures called Lewy bodies in the nerve cells of their brains. It these may contribute to the death of brain cells. There is disagreement, however, over diffuse Lewy body disease is a distinct illness or a variant of Alzheimer's or Parkinson's Dementia is often mild at the outset and can be extremely variable from day to day. So such as delusions, extreme confusion, hallucinations, falls and Parkinson's-type tremor common. People with DLBD are very sensitive to side effects of neuroleptic drugs (anti e.g. Melleril and Serenace). There is no treatment at present.

#### Vascular dementia

This is the second most common cause of dementia. It is a term for dementia associate problems in the circulation of blood to the brain (cerebrovascular disease). There is no as yet to reverse the effects of vascular dementia, though drugs may be used to contro blood pressure (hypertension) which is known to be a risk factor.

- Multi-infarct dementia (MID) is the most common kind of vascular dementia result of many small strokes or decreased blood flow to the brain. These stroke: damage any area of the brain responsible for a specific function. If there is one strategic area, dementia may result. Vascular dementia may appear similar to Alzheimer's.
- Subcortical vascular dementia (Binswanger's disease) is another slowly evol of dementia but the blood vessels affected are deep inside the brain (in the sub Symptoms include slowness and lethargy and emotional ups and downs.

#### Frontal lobe or fronto-temporal dementias

Pick's disease, like Alzheimer's disease, causes progressive and irreversible disease.

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<u>Travel Health Centre</u> <u>Women's Health Centre</u> person's abilities over a number of years. The frontal lobe dementias cause less per cent of all dementias. As the name suggests, these disorders affect mainly I and temporal lobes of the brain and usually begin between 40 to 65 years of ag Disturbances of personality, behaviour (particularly lack of inhibitions) and lang precede and initially be more severe than memory defects. The causes of fronta dementia and Pick's disease are not yet known, but in a minority of cases they families.

Huntington's disease is an inherited, degenerative brain disease which affect:
 and body. It usually appears between the ages of 30 and 50 and is characterise
 intellectual decline and irregular, involuntary movement of the limbs or facial m
 Other symptoms include personality change, memory disturbance, slurred spee
 impaired judgement and psychiatric problems. Diagnosis includes an evaluation
 medical history and CAT brain scanning. There is no treatment available to stop
 progression of the disease, but medication can control movement disorders and
 psychiatric symptoms. Dementia occurs in the majority of cases.

#### Alcohol

Alcohol, if taken in excess, leads to irreversible brain damage. This is particularly so if associated with poor diet, blackouts and frequent falls. The most vulnerable parts of th those used for memory, higher cognitive tasks such as planning, organising and judge social skills and balance. If drinking ceases, there can be some improvement. Thiaming vitamin, is important to limit some of the toxic effects of alcohol, and is an important s for heavy drinkers.

#### Structural brain problems

- Head injury, if severe, can produce permanent change in a person's ability to in their behaviour and personality. Usually this follows only if a person has beer unconscious for a long time.
- Benign tumour or hydrocephelus can cause dementia. Hydrocephalus does build-up of the pressure of fluid inside the brain cavities. Often there is a histor meningitis, bleeding inside the head or head trauma and/or headache. Symptor shuffling walk and incontinence of urine, as well as slowing of thinking. If detec it can sometimes be treated by removing the tumour or insertion of a shunt to fluid from the brain and so relieve the pressure. Unfortunately, this treatment d always work to reverse the dementia.

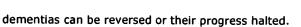
#### **Infection related dementias**

- Infection: some forms of dementia are due to infection. The most common of the past was syphilis. Today, many people in the later stages of AIDS develop I dementia. Symptoms can include apathy, vagueness, confusion, difficulty in concentrating, forgetfulness, withdrawal and flattened emotions. However, aspeperson's original personality will usually remain intact to the end.
- Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease: despite recent publicity about Mad Cow disease, I an extremely rare, fatal brain disorder caused by a transmissible infectious orga probably a 'slow virus'. Early symptoms include failing memory, changes of beh a lack of co-ordination. As the disease progresses, usually very rapidly, mental deterioration becomes pronounced, involuntary movements appear, and the pabecome blind, develop weakness in the arms or legs and ultimately lapse into a The slow virus is not infectious in the same way as the flu, but can only be tran through nerve tissue. A small percentage of cases of CJD run in families.

## Dementia-like symptoms which are treatable and/or potentially reversible de

 Some medical conditions, such as vitamin and hormone deficiencies (thyroid an B12 being the most common) can cause dementia. If detected and treated early





 Serious forgetfulness and some other dementia-like symptoms sometimes are c a condition which can be cured. When such a condition is treated appropriately, memory improves. Therefore, it is important for anyone with dementia-like beh seek a thorough assessment to find the cause.

Conditions of this sort include:

- psychiatric disorders such as anxiety and depression (called 'pseudo-dementia')
- clashes of medication. Some medical problems can make any dementia appear than it need be. These include infections, painful disorders and uncontrolled chr disease such as heart, liver or kidney failure. Even constipation makes dementia

#### Dementia is not a normal part of ageing

- Older age presents a risk factor, but is not the cause of dementia.
- Loss of memory in dementia is more than just becoming a little forgetful. It is p and progressive, not just occasional.

#### Where to go for help

Looking after someone with dementia is often lonely, difficult, exhausting and at times devastating. The following suggestions may help carers, friends and relatives to cope  $\mathfrak a$  manage better.

- Contact your local Alzheimer's Association for information, emotional support ar counselling.
- Join your local Support Group.
- Contact your local Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT), through your local hos information about day care programs, respite services, home nursing help, and community support services such as Meals on Wheels.
- Ask relatives, friends and neighbours to assist you with the caring role. You will
  assist them to understand the nature and management of the disease.

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